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ABSTRACT

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THE DEVOLUTION OF 20TH CENTURY PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN RHETORIC: A CALL FOR "RHETORICAL SERVICE"

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Abstract

Over the course of the 20th Century, American Presidential campaign rhetoric has undergone various metamorphoses. Most of these changes can be traced to developments in technology and media. Furthermore, many of these changes have had the unfortunate effect of undermining rational choice of the electorate, and thus threaten our democracy. Like candidate-selecting conventions, controversial debate on substantive issues has all but disappeared, having been replaced by the marketing of images. The marketing process is, in turn, controlled by corporations, unions, PACs, and individual moguls, who can finance the huge costs. It seems quite unlikely that those now in power, those benefitting from the system, patrons and politicians alike, are likely to change on their own accord.

It is within this context of information void created by political planners, strategists, spin doctors, and media consultants; working for isolated candidates and anonymous monied interests, that this paper will argue that it is up to academics to create rhetorical resources for voters. These resources should range from objective compilations of facts, to analysis and interpretation, to partisan argument and debate. The dissemination of such communication can be provided by public media such as PBS and NPR, or it can be facilitated by universities themselves, crediting faculty and students as they provide an urgently needed national community service.

DEMOCRATIC DEVOLUTION

Where We Are Today

Despite some early spirited primaries in the race for the Republican presidential nomination, many Americans are very unhappy with contemporary political processes. Electing a professional wrestler as governor of Minnesota may be just the opening shot in a major grass-roots citizen's revolt. Listen to the talk! "2000 will be like '98, '96, '94, and '92–another money-soaked, corporate-driven, issue-avoiding, made-for-television snoozer, completely unconnected to real life" (Hightower, 2000, p. 5). "Our political system is presently in the hands of a self-serving, powerful few, known as an oligarchy" (Nader, 2000, p.1). "The dirty secret of American presidential politics is that the nation's wealthiest interests largely determine who will be the next President of the United States, in the year *before* the election" (Lewis, 2000, p. 3). "The notion that the end of rhetoric is judgment presupposes that rhetoric consists of argument–statement and proof. Morselized ads and news bites consist of statement alone" [hence, there is no argument (logos)] (Jamieson, 1988, p. 240). "It is time to toss away the flimsy rationalizations that have been set up, where no real and mature arguments can stand" (Haddock, 2000a, p.1). These quotes all indicate a growing public dissatisfaction with our political processes and rhetoric as we enter yet another national presidential campaign. Furthermore, these quotes call our attention to a number of pressing current problems centering around the idea that the American citizen is no longer able to cast an informed, meaningful ballot that counts. This sad state of affairs has resulted from fundamental changes that have taken place during the twentieth century in terms of technological, economic, and political transformations. To fully appreciate these transformations, we need to consider for a moment some historical background.

Historical Background: How We Got To Where We Are Today

Democracy in the United States of America has always been as much myth as reality. Oligarchy is nothing new. Consider for a moment that eighteen of our presidents are descendants of European kings, nine are Mayflower descendants, and twenty-six are related to each other (Eskin, 1997, pp. 7-9). In the presidential election of 1789, America's first, only 4 percent of the people were even allowed to vote (Hightower, p. 309). Almost immediately after the election, monied interests sided with Hamilton and the Federalists over against the Jefferson Republican faction (Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1997). Moreover, concern with the present candidates being controlled by Wall Street (the names are still there--J. P. Morgan and Morgan Stanley) should ring a bell. The great "robber barons" exerted notorious influence at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. After reformer Teddy Roosevelt instituted controls over those he labeled the "criminal rich" and "malefactors of great wealth," U.S. Steel magnate, H. C. Frick furiously declared, "We bought the son of a bitch and then he did not stay bought!" (Boller, 1996, p. 186). Of course, the Republicans weren't the only party controlled by external forces; Tammany Hall's manipulation of the Democratic party was equally notorious. William Jennings Bryan, "champion of the common man" and ardent supporter of Woodrow Wilson, swore off both.

Not only has "undue influence' been an ongoing concern, but so has the election process itself. Traditionally candidates were chosen by party leaders and insiders, not by open caucuses or primaries. Primaries are by-and-large a twentieth century invention, first used in the process of nominating a presidential candidate in the election of 1912. Again Teddy Roosevelt can take

credit for the move toward more democracy, as it was the Progressives in fourteen states who saw that such a system would work to their advantage (Mayer, 1996, p. 336).

Not only are primaries a twentieth-century phenomenon, but so are campaigns in the modern sense of the word. Harding is renown for his "front porch campaign," where "patriotic, professional, and party groups making the pilgrimage to his place" would be treated to assorted "platitudes and pleasantries" (Boller, 1996, p. 213). Harding himself was not excited, the party was not excited (Republican Senator Brandegee commented, "There ain't any first-raters this year...we got a lot of second-raters and Warren Harding is the best of the second-raters" [Boller, p. 213]), and certainly the general population was not excited. Lack of relevance and interest for the American public continued. In the election of 1924 featuring "silent Cal," Will Rogers commented on the Republican convention in Cleveland, "the city [ought to] open up the churches to liven things up a bit" (Boller, p. 219). Yet we must remember that Teddy Roosevelt did campaign about real and pressing issues, as did Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson.

Issues and Images in the Land of Oz

Who or what are we voting for (or against)? For most Americans the answer to this question is unclear. Are we voting for the person, the party, or the issues? Different voters have different approaches and mix these elements in different ways. What is the best approach?

As early as 1972, Hahn and Gonchar suggested that media created images were just as legitimate as issues and were worthy guides for our vote. In fact, the candidate images were said to control the "theme" or "world view," which in turn controlled the "issues" that were "selected" and "framed" in appropriate language. This view has been reiterated more recently by Hahn

(1998) with minor revisions, giving issues a bit more prominence. The problem with this view is that such things as "themes" and "images" can be much more easily fabricated and manipulated by public relations consultants, campaign strategists, and media experts than can issues (while fully admitting that issues can also be invented, distorted, and manipulated).

Perhaps the strongest argument against using images as our guide was offered by Jamieson (1988), referring to Presidential hopeful Senator Joseph Biden (D. Delaware) who was caught with the words of British Labor's Neil Kinnock in his mouth:

> Of the public personae of three liberals, Biden was fashioning a fourth. No one would fault his choice of ancestors were he not proclaiming that he was self-created. This act of rhetorical parthenogenesis invites us to ask, Is there a person who is Joseph Biden or is he simply a persona constructed of the feelings and history of other? And were he elected, how would we know who it was who was leading? Or whether the person who today is Kinnock and yesterday was RFK might not tomorrow submit to the allure of a new master text? (p. 223)

Many Democratic voters may have felt the same way toward Bill Clinton (Hightower, 2000). Other examples of flimsy images include "Barry Goldwater," who Jamieson refers to, quoting Richard Rovere, as "the strident language and impolitic opinions of another man" (p. 223). Likewise, Jamieson observes that "Richard Nixon" seemed to be two different people at almost the same time, as "different personae [began] to speak through the mouth of the same person"; "the difference between the two Nixons was the difference in speech writers" (p. 335). As early as 1960, Adlai Stevenson, a statesman of unusual intelligence and eloquence, complained of "the ever greater use of the ghost writer and the ever greater difficulty of knowing the candidate himself" (Jamieson, p. 236). In conclusion, Jamieson questions relying on candidate images, even though they seem to be the most prominent features of most contemporary Presidential campaigns:

> With the advent of an electorate of millions and a country spanning oceans, direct experience of the character of a speaker is unattainable for most of those called on to judge public discourse. When we see a potential leader through the filter provided by pseudo-events, news bites, or nuggetized ads and then can know for certain only that most politicians do not speak their own words, *ethos* is a less reliable anchor for belief. (p. 240)

This is not to say that Presidential images should play no role, but that "public discourse must be enriched with logos as well" in the form of rational debate of issues as they are imbedded in a sense of history (Jamieson, p. 241).

It is probably no coincidence that the term "image" should be the center of much of the political campaign argument. "Image" is the essence of television. However, even though the "imaging" of issues is more difficult, this is precisely what many communication scholars have called for (Bennett, 1992; Berquist & Golden, 1981; Zarefsky, 1992). Still others, while recognizing that "images" are more appropriate for television, do not seem to see any way out and appear somewhat resigned to the demise of meaningful issue-oriented debate (McBath & Fisher, 1969; Scharm, 1998; Sigelman, 1992).

Of course, it is possible that lack of debate on meaningful issues will become a public issue itself. Al Gore, realizing that such debate would work to his advantage has challenged George W. Bush to a series of debates focused on single issues and has coupled this proposal to another which would eliminate spot political ads. The latter proposal would also be a first step to campaign finance reform, since such ads are largely responsible for television's high costs (Jamieson, 1996, p. 522). However, it is somewhat doubtful that George W. Bush would agree to such a proposal, unless he fell desperately behind in the polls, which appears quite unlikely at this point in time. Presidential debates we will no doubt have, as they have all but become an American institution (Jamieson & Birdsell, 1988). But the format and substance of such debates

will focus on concocted themes and images rather than on real issues, many of which unfortunately are quite critical.

ANATOMY OF CHANGE

As previously alluded to, a number of changes have occurred during the twentieth century that have had major effects on our political processes. These transformations have taken place simultaneously in the technological, economic, and political arenas. Some of these changes have had positive effects toward more democracy and some of these changes have had negative effects. In recent years, however, as candidates appear to be chosen earlier and earlier in a front-loaded primary system, dependent upon the intense use of television advertising, requiring millions upon millions of dollars of "soft money," provided by corporate giants, unions, and PACs; the threat to any true popular democracy has become critical.

Technological Transformation

Three important technological transformations have shaped the political process in ways undreamt by the our nation's founding fathers. These include the rise of mechanical transportation, the wide-spread distribution of print media, made possible by the new transportation, and finally the introduction of electronic media–radio, television, and computers.

Transportation. The first mass transportation systems to link various parts of the country were the railroads, which were encouraged by government land grants in the 1850s. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the United States had five transcontinental rail lines. This development not only dispersed the American population, but at the same time provided national politicians a means of contacting their electorate and constituency. From the time Stephen A. Douglas personally made the first nation-wide campaign in the election of 1860, through the

famous "whistle stop campaigns" of Wilson, FDR, and Truman from the rear platforms of campaign trains, railroads have played an important role in bringing candidates into direct contact with the electorate.

As automotive and air transportation emerged in the twentieth century, campaign busses and planes, many with intriguing names like "The Straight Talk Express" (John McCain), crisscrossed the country. But such political travel marathons are not without costs. This kind of campaigning, in addition to being physically exhausting for candidates, also creates additional major expenses. Some of these transportation costs come directly out of candidate and party war chests; others are absorbed by double-use corporate and governmental hitchhikes.

Popular Print. It was transportation that allowed for the widespread distribution of newspapers and magazines. These media, as they developed, not only provided more information about candidates, but provided thoughtful analysis and in-depth commentary, as well as pictures and stinging cartoons (Fischer, 1996). Whether cartoons, such as President Carter's mental nude Statue of Liberty, contributed to or undermined thoughtful consideration of candidates is open to debate. But newspapers, and especially magazine articles, at least in the twentieth century, did allow for some extended, well-reasoned arguments and reflection on timely issues. Content analysis has revealed that issue coverage increased for six decades during the twentieth century, before it began to decrease with the expanded use of television (Sigelman, 1992, p. 408). Newspapers, of course, changed over the century, from at first being the products of individual entrepreneurs, financed largely through political contributions, to business enterprises profiting from high circulation, to vehicles of capitalist institutions through their dependence on advertising (Tebbel & Watts, 1985, p.320). Likewise, their coverage and treatment of presidential campaigns

changed as it followed the self-interest of the newspapers.

On the other hand, the press probably was not as influential in the process of picking a President as are the electronic media today, Henry Luce's creation of Wendell Wilkie not withstanding. Patterson (1994) describes the current situation, "The news media do not entirely determine who will win the nomination, but no candidate can succeed without the press" (p. 33).

Electronic Media. In some ways the electronic news media are extensions of the press, but in other ways they are something entirely new. To be sure, it was telegraphy that followed the railroads that made transcontinental news possible. But as the technology of telegraphy was transformed into the technologies of radio, television, and computers, not only did the "ratios of the senses" change, but the ratios of political campaigns were altered as well.

Radio came into its own in the 1920s. The results of the 1920 Harding election were broadcast over KDKA in Pittsburgh and by the election of 1928, Hoover was giving speeches over a nation-wide network (It is interesting to note that Hoover was also the last President to write his own speeches.) (Boller, 1996, pp. 224, 235). The real master of radio, though was Franklin Delano Roosevelt. At the same time, two vital issues of over-riding importance, the Great Depression and World War II, appeared to shatter traditional political alignments of the electorate. However, Hess (1980) observes that it is the electronic media that cut the candidate free from party apparatus, blurring party distinctions, shifting the focus from party ideologies to divergent issues. Whether it was the media or the current events, something changed in American presidential politics. FDR's knack for phrase making (with the help of speech writers and advisors), coupled with his direct appeal to the American people in their living rooms as they

listened to his "fireside chats," created a new kind of personalized identity with our nation's leader (not too far removed from what was happening on German radio at the same time).

Although television was used in a limited way in the 1948 campaign, it did not come into its own until the 1952 campaign. Eisenhower, in addition to delivering forty televised speeches, broke into the true vernacular of the medium with TV spot ads (Boller, 1996, p. 282). Initially television's impact on the presidential election process was unclear. Eisenhower's opponent was the witty intellectual, Adlai Stevenson, who appeared on television to "talk sense to the American people" (Boller, 1996, p. 285). Yet Stevenson was skeptical of the new medium, prophetically declaring, "Let's get television under control before it runs away with the election process" (Plissner, 1999, p.129).

The election of 1960 produced the first television "debates" between two candidates, John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon. It is estimated that at least fifty-five percent of the adult population saw all four debates, and over eight percent saw at least one (Kirkpatrick, 1979, p. 2). The networks had wanted real debates, constructive arguments followed by rebuttals, all focused on one topic, with no moderator and no questions. Unfortunately, neither Kennedy nor Nixon found this acceptable, and so "presidential debates" became the moniker for a joint news conference on various topics coordinated by a moderator and stimulated by a panel of news reporters (replaced by citizens in 1992). This, of course, was a far cry from the Lincoln-Douglas model that ran for three hours on a single issue. Yet, looking back from what we have experienced more recently, the "issues were exceptionally well-stated on both sides of all four debates (Plissner, p. 133). Moreover, "nearly all of the cheap shots, all the digressions from serious discussion of issues came from the reporters and ... there were relatively little of that"

(Plissner, p. 132). After sixteen years without debates, they were once again revived in 1976 and continue today as an American institution, albeit transformed to tabloid-level infotainment, "more like *Rivera Live* or *Crossfire* than Kennedy-Nixon, let alone Lincoln-Douglas" (Plissner, p. 147).

But television has had other negative effects on the presidential election process, some far more serious that infotainment. Plissner (1999) traces how the medium has contributed to such problems as front-loaded primaries, the demise of conventions, calling results of elections, focus on image, polling the horse races, news sound bites, and spot ads. As indicated previously, what makes many of these developments threatening to democracy is not necessarily their own substance or process, but rather the economics they have imposed on political campaigns, an economics beyond the grasp of even millionaires and only within the grasp of corporate entities eager to make major political investments.

A discussion of electronic media would not be complete without mention of computer technology. Aside from its importance in generating and maintaining direct mail campaigns, this medium has yet to prove its impact. The effectiveness of Web sites can be questioned on two grounds, numbers and audience. According to a 1998 Voter News Service survey, only six percent of voters indicated their source for campaign information was the Internet, compared to seventy-two percent citing television (Plissner, 1999, p. 200). The other problem with the Internet is that the audience is primarily self-selecting. Television, on the other hand, provides many more opportunities to preach to the unconverted. Yet, as computer technology develops, and especially as it merges with television, it may loom much larger in presidential elections; in fact, the time may not be too distant when we find ourselves using this technology to vote.

Economic Transformation

Runaway costs. In 1995-1996, between $135 million and $150 million in "soft money" was spent on political advertising; two years later, in a non-Presidential election the advertising bill was upped to $300 million (Lewis, 2000, p. 13). In 2000, it appears that the sky is the limit. And the spending starts early and furiously. In the Iowa straw poll, Bush coughed up $825,000 for about $111 a vote, which was paltry compared to Steve Forbes who spent close to $2 million, which came to approximately $400 a vote (Lewis, p. 2). A slightly more generous interpretation than buying votes is to think of voters as a market for political products (Haddock, 2000b). These political products are sold to us primarily the way all products are sold, through ads and product promotions. What we need to keep in mind is that the company promoting the product always makes enough money on the sale to cover the costs of promotion. This principle is aptly illustrated by Lewis (2000) as he documents over and over how corporate America has reaped tremendous profits from political sales.

Runaway funding. The Republicans have established "Team $1 Million," whereby they are recruiting one hundred members who will donate a million dollars over a four year period in anticipation of the costs of mounting a presidential election campaign (Hightower, 2000). Although according to Lewis (2000), some companies have attained this level of eleemosynary ebullience in soft money (Philip Morris, Amway, American Financial Group, Nabisco/R.J. Renolds, AT&T, ARCO, and ADM for Republicans; four labor unions and Seagram for Democrats); one hundred donors at this level clearly raises the ante. For those who cannot obtain such levels of ingratiation, there are lesser categories, "Eagles" ($15,000+) and "Team 100" ($100,000+) for Republicans, and "Majority Council" ($50,000+) and "Trustees" ($100,000+) for

Democrats. Who makes these kinds of contributions, considering that ninety-six percent of Americans make no political donations whatsoever? According to Hightower (2000), only .002% contribute $10,000-$100,000, and .0001% contribute more than $100,000 (p. 68). Lest one get the idea that it is the Republicans who are most adept at playing the money game, it should be remembered that it was Clinton and the Democrats who virtually invented "soft money" (Hightower). So despite cries of "campaign finance reform" that one hears issuing from the mouths of candidates, it is very unlikely that significant changes will occur while the beneficiaries of the present system are in power, and there is little hope that anyone else will gain access to power given the present dollar-driven system.

Political Transformation

So, even though we have retained some of the vestiges of democracy in our political documents, categories, rituals, and language; the truth of the matter is that the substance has all but vanished. The few American voters who even bother going through the motions of pulling the levers have only vague ideas of why they are voting the way they are. It is interesting that voting surged in the Republican Primaries this year when voters sensed there was a true alternative in John McCain. But, the corporate-party juggernaut proved too much for a few highly motivated Democrats, Republicans, and independents that backed the marginal reformer.

People like Jim Hightower and Ralph Nader look for a rebellious, enlivened grassroots movement of the electorate; but they overestimate the awareness and concern of the American people. They also underestimate the effects of media soma, where most people's reality lies somewhere between mindless entertainment and the day-to-day drudgery of job and family. The connection with politics and politician is either taken lightly or not taken at all. Even as doctor

bills go unpaid, as high-paying jobs are replaced with low-paying jobs, as children are shot in their schools, as personal debt soars, as environmental pollution resurges, as the elderly trek to Canada to buy medicine, the connection is not made. The connection is not made because whoever gets elected to office seems to produce the same result. And small wonder, given the true dynamics of contemporary corporate political power.

The people cannot pull themselves out of this situation, international corporate conglomerates certainly do not want to relinquish control, and politicians in bed with corporations are unlikely to make any unexpected moves; so what is left? Church and schools–two institutions that are normally led around by the nose by cultural hegemony, but two insitutions that occasionally come alive in revolutionary ways, drawing from hidden powerful spiritual resources that are usually not too far from the tranquil surface. There are probably no professions more feared because of their influence and unpredictability than religious prophets and university professors. How many revolutions, even in recent years have been fomented by such forces? The highly successful Civil Rights Movement and the Anti-Vietnam War Protest immediately come to mind.

ACADEMIC SERVICE TO THE RESCUE

The Heart of the Problem

One thing American citizens do not need is band-aid campaign finance reform. What is really needed is an election campaign revolution. Why should American citizens be any more interested in candidate personality and image than corporate "sponsors" are? Conversely, why should American citizens be any less interested in issues and policy than corporate "sponsors" are? Furthermore, the inordinate interest in presidential elections and little interest in

congressional elections makes even less sense. Of course it makes sense from the viewpoint of national media networks, but it makes absolutely no sense from the interests of voters. The interests of voting citizens ought to be tied to policy as enacted by the legislature and administered by the executive. Of course legislation is just as complex as the issues, but in a democracy all civic ignorance is culpable.

It is not only the media who have created the problem, but, to a lesser extent, the academic community has contributed as well. Especially we rhetoricians have been caught up in the media enchantment of personality, image, and theme. Applying the postmodern pragmatic test to these pseudo-political constructions, we have focused exclusively on short-term success as defined by the media and marketers themselves. We have not been concerned with the long-term effects on our society and on the democratic process itself. Moreover, in the typical postmodern fashion, we have focused on questions of what motivates voters to vote for a specific candidate, and have by and large ignored questions of what ought to motivate voters to vote for a better government and better country.

Perhaps part of the problem of academic failure in this area lies in the shift of emphasis in higher education in recent years away from history, philosophy, and the value-sensitive humanities, moving instead toward "practical," vocational, and market-driven curriculum. At any rate, numerous critics of society in general, and of education in particular, have warned about the loss of values, sense of history, common culture, and responsibility to each other–the very glue that holds society together (Bellah, 1985; Bloom, 1987; Boyer, 1981, 1987; Boyer & Levine, 1981; Palmer, 1983; Slater, 1976).

Further exacerbating the problem has been the concurrent de-emphasis of rational argument and discourse in our own discipline. This is not to argue that we should return to neo-Aristotelianism, patriarchal rhetorical edicts, or hyper-competitive models of debate. We have made proper and necessary corrections to a limited view of persuasion; but in the process, we very well may have overcorrected in the department of *logos*. Basically what we need is a recovery of rhetoric as a humanistic activity, with a long-range pragmatic view of how it can inform our political behavior. As Astin (1997) asks, "If higher education doesn't start giving citizenship and democracy much greater priority, then who will?" (p. 221). Besides political science departments, who is better equipped to be out in the forefront meeting this need than departments of communication?

Solving the Problem by Providing a Needed Service

Ever since Boyer and Hechinger (1981) spoke up for the Carnegie Foundation defining "higher learning's most essential mission in the nation's service" (p. 62), colleges have scrambled to apply knowledge in the form of community service programs. But Boyer and Hechinger had something more than this in mind, especially as applied to citizenship. In addition to increased political participation, they unequivocally called for an educational curriculum that would "help shape a citizenry that can weigh decisions wisely and more effectively promote public good" (p. 60). Academics in the field of communication can work to attain this goal in five basic ways: (1) clarifying the political process, (2) serving as a gatekeeper to identify rhetorical fraud and propaganda, (3) identifying and defining real issues, (4) facilitating rational, informed debate of the issues, and (5) reinstating the importance of party platforms. These five avenues of service will be briefly developed conceptually; their implementation, of course, may be more problematic

as the devil is always in the details. Yet, universities have numerous communication technologies at their finger tips, ranging from computer networks to university television and radio stations to speakers bureaus. Also, many professors may have access to public media, and many prominent academics may have access to commercial media as well. Using these resources, we can provide a much needed rhetorical service.

Clarifying the political process. As indicated earlier, many Americans simply are ignorant of the dynamics of the contemporary political process. They have their suspicions, but a clear and careful documentation of what is occurring is missing. Popular writers such as Lewis (2000) and Hightower (2000) have set the stage for a more thorough and careful documentation of the link between campaign funding and public policy. Voters need to be aware of legislative records, including details that make big differences. They need to know exactly who is benefitting and who is losing. They need to be able to identify political power bases and organizations that sustain such power bases. Of course, much of the most important information is carefully and purposely hidden from the public; so this is no easy project. Long, sustained research would be required. However, the investment in time, effort, and money might take place if it is seriously and amply rewarded by the university as "service," on a par with "scholarship," when tenure and promotion decision are made. The most obvious outlet for such detailed research would probably be print, possibly in the form of a university publication. It could further be summarized and popularized on a Web site.

Gatekeeping. The public needs to be continually educated in the area of rhetorical misrepresentation and propaganda, both generally and specifically. For some reason, the teaching of logical fallacy has gone out of style, although the use of such flourishes. But what is even more

effective is the pointing out of current rhetorical violations. Perhaps the most popular version of this function was carried out by Eric Engberg on CBS as *Reality Check*. Engberg would run a clip from the Bush or Clinton campaign and then shout "Time out!" A brief expose of the politician caught in the act of lying or misrepresenting would follow. Engberg's pieces were relatively short, usually no more than three minutes, and they simply dealt with sound bites, not major issues. However, except for a few notable blunders, Engberg was usually right on the money with his criticism (Plissner, p.192). Nevertheless, Engberg and others like him were criticized as creators of public cynicism. While academics might also be open to such a charge, it must be kept in mind that their ethos is quite different than that of a media news reporter. Also, with a more thorough and scholarly vehicle of criticism, the tone could be considerably raised, so that the onus would fall on the politicians and not the bearer of bad news.

Identifying and defining issues. Obviously we cannot debate the important and pending issues if we do not know what they are. Not knowing the issues has been a major argument against focusing on issues rather than on candidates. But the real issues can be located with a little research and effort; and the phoney issues can be exposed and dismissed. The real issues can be discovered by following lobbyists and money. Heavy campaign financiers are investing in real issues, issues which are concretely enacted in terms of legislation. Real issues can be determined by history--political, geo-political, economic, and social. Real issues are those that can be reasonably materialized in terms of public policy; they are not abstract philosophical or theological stands. Moreover, real issues involve the probable rather than the possible. All of these criteria can be determined more or less accurately by careful study. Academics, again, are in the position to provide this service. Furthermore, rhetoricians are experts at defining issues. Academic debate

and problem-solving discussion has always emphasized such guidelines as dealing with only one issue at a time, avoiding loaded terms, unequivocalness, inherence, vitalness, and stock issues involving need, a plan, and consequences (Rybacki & Rybacki, 1991). Careful definition of issues will lay the groundwork for meaningful public debate.

Facilitating rational debate. Academics need to go beyond setting the agenda, lest they be simply ignored. They must actually facilitate competent debate, perhaps using students, graduate researchers, or participating themselves. (Many professors have had years of training in academic debate, which should be able to be converted to practical application.) Issues need to be fully developed and then forced upon candidates for a response. If there is no response, academics need to predict responses based on political histories and campaign backing. Then it will be up to the candidates to either accept the predicted response by their silence, or get involved in the debate by denial or clarification. Insightful debate must force the hand (and brain and mouth) of PR varnished politicians. As previously mentioned, universities have numerous means at their disposal to draw public attention to such vital discourse.

Reinstating the importance of platforms. Once candidates have made a commitment, they need to be held to that commitment. If the commitments are based on thorough, realistic, rational debate; broadside, unkeepable promises such as George Bush's "read my lips" pledge, "no new taxes," can be avoided. Hopefully with all the issues clearly on the table, platforms will be restored to a renewed level of importance. Moreover, as platforms take on a new significance, attention will be shifted from the isolated presidential candidate (and his vice-presidential appendage) to the party, which includes members on Congress, who engage in a most important function of democracy, the enactment of policy in the form of legislation.

Of course, all this means that academic rhetorical service must be an ongoing project to keep all political candidates honest. Such service cannot be limited to a once-every-four-years exercise. What is called for represents a major effort and investment of the academic community, but what is at stake is our democracy itself and our survival as an informed and free people.

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